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Montana Statewide Dropout Report 1998-99

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Montana school districts have reported dropout numbers to OPI since 1994-95 using a consistent dropout reporting method developed by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES). Schools are provided with a handbook listing conditions for determining whether or not a student is considered a dropout. Schools report data for grades 7 through 12 by gender and racial/ethnic categories. Each fall the schools provide dropout data for the prior year. In 1998-99, reports were received from all accredited high schools and 97 percent of the 7th and 8th grades (representing 92 percent of the enrollment). Four small 7-8 grade schools and the Missoula and Sidney districts did not report their grades 7 and 8 dropouts.¹

The Economic Impact of Dropping Out of School

Students who drop out of school without earning a diploma will face a harsh economic world. Nationally, over 25 percent of recent dropouts are unemployed or not enrolled in postsecondary programs compared to 4 percent of recent high school graduates. If dropouts are employed, their salaries are only about 40 percent of the average salary of those with high school diplomas. About one-third of female dropouts are pregnant, and facing child-rearing responsibilities without job experience or education to help support their children adequately. In addition to those economic statistics, dropouts make up an alarming percentage of the prison population (82 percent), far costlier to both the individual dropout and to the society than a high school and college education.²

1998-99 Dropout Data¹

- ✓ Approximately 2,439 students dropped out of Montana schools in grades 7 through 12.
- ✓ The one-year dropout rate for Montana grades 7 and 8 was 0.6 percent.
- ✓ The one-year dropout rate for Montana high schools was 4.4 percent. The national average is currently about 5 percent.
- ✓ The “typical” Montana dropout was a white male who dropped out of a large high school in his junior year:
 - Seventy-five percent of the dropouts were white, 25 percent were from minority groups.
 - Nearly 57 percent were male.
 - Males dropped out at a higher rate at all grade levels.
 - Half of the dropouts are from the 7 largest school districts (AA schools).

Dropout Rates by Grade and Gender

In Montana schools, more boys than girls are enrolled at every grade level. About 52 percent are boys and 48 percent are girls. Boys also have higher dropout rates at all grade levels, resulting in a total 1998-99 dropout count of 319 more boys dropping out than girls. The highest dropout rate for boys is in grade 11 when many students turn 16 (or have completed grade 8, whichever comes later) and students can legally exit the school system. The highest dropout number occurs at grade 10.

Observations of Table 1—Rates by Grade and Gender

- ✓ The 11th grade dropout rates are highest overall at 4.6 percent, but 10th grade has the largest number of dropouts with 597.
- ✓ Nearly 57 percent of the total dropouts were male and 43 percent were female.
- ✓ The 9th grade dropout rate (3.2%) is lower than the other high school grades, and is lower than in past years.
- ✓ The 7th and 8th grade dropout rates are relatively low (0.6 percent), but represent 151 students leaving school at a very early age.

Table 1
1998-99 Montana Dropout Rates by Grade and Gender

Grade	Dropout Rates				Dropout Numbers*		
	Statewide	Male	Female		Statewide	Male	Female
HS Total	4.2%	4.6%	3.7%		2,150	1,218	934
Gr 12	4.3%	5.1%	3.5%		511	311	200
Gr 11	4.6%	5.2%	4.0%		587	337	250
Gr 10	4.5%	4.6%	4.4%		597	315	282
Gr 9	3.2%	3.5%	3.0%		455	254	201
7&8 Total	0.6%	0.7%	0.5%		151	92	59
Gr 8	0.6%	0.7%	0.5%		79	47	32
Gr 7	0.5%	0.7%	0.4%		72	45	27
Overall Total					2,301	1,310	1,991

*Statewide totals projected from reported rates

Dropout Rates by Racial/Ethnic Categories

Dropout rates vary by racial/ethnic categories, and for most minority groups are higher than the dropout rates for white students. In the 1998-99 school year, Montana high school enrollment included 89.4 percent white students, 8.1 percent American Indians, 0.7 percent Asians, 1.5 percent Hispanics, and 0.3 percent blacks. Because the number of minority students is relatively low, their annual dropout rates may vary widely from year to year. Averages over a period of years are more realistic indicators of the dropout rates. Table 2 lists the dropout rates for four years, and the average of those years.

Observations of Table 2—Four-Year Averages for Racial/Ethnic Categories

- ✓ The statewide high school dropout rates have slowly declined over the past four years.
- ✓ American Indian students drop out of high school at a rate more than three times that of white students.
- ✓ American Indian students drop out of grades 7 and 8 at a rate more than six times that of white students.
- ✓ Although minorities represent only about 13 percent of the total school enrollment, they account for approximately 25 percent of the dropouts.

Table 2
Montana Dropouts by Racial/Ethnic Categories for Four Years

Category	7th & 8th Dropout Rates					High School Dropout Rates				
	1998-99	1997-98	1996-97	1995-96	4-yr Avg	1998-99	1997-98	1996-97	1995-96	4-yr Avg
American Indian	2.2%	2.8%	2.2%	2.3%	2.4%	10.6%	13.6%	19.4%	10.9%	13.6%
Asian	0.5%	0.0%	0.0%	0.7%	0.3%	3.0%	2.6%	4.1%	6.4%	4.0%
Hispanic	0.9%	1.7%	3.1%	2.3%	2.0%	5.7%	8.7%	12.0%	13.0%	9.9%
Black	0.9%	0.6%	1.1%	2.6%	1.3%	8.2%	5.2%	6.0%	13.8%	8.3%
All Minority	1.9%	2.3%	2.2%	2.3%	2.2%	9.4%	11.9%	16.2%	10.9%	12.3%
White	0.4%	0.2%	0.4%	0.2%	0.3%	3.5%	3.9%	4.6%	5.2%	4.3%
Statewide	0.6%	0.5%	0.6%	0.5%	0.6%	4.2%	4.7%	5.5%	5.7%	5.0%

Dropout Rates by Size of District

For the purposes of comparing similar-sized school districts, Montana districts have been identified by size categories based on enrollment numbers. Table 3 provides dropout data for the identified size categories. The largest seven systems in categories 1E and 1H (AA schools) have the highest dropout rate and account for about half the total dropouts.

Category-Elementary Enrollment

1E=more than 2500 students
2E=851 to 2500
3E=401 to 850
4E=151 to 400
5E=41 to 150
6E=40 or fewer

Category-High School Enrollment

1H=more than 1250 students
2H=401 to 1250
3H=201 to 400
4H=76 to 200
5H=75 or fewer

Category - K-12 Districts

1K=400 or more students
2K=399 or fewer

Table 3
Montana Dropout Rate by School District Size

<u>Level</u>	<u>1E, 1H</u>	<u>2E, 2H</u>	<u>3E, 3H</u>	<u>4E, 4H</u>	<u>5E, 5H</u>	<u>6E</u>	<u>1K</u>	<u>2K</u>	<u>All Schools</u>
<u>7/8 dropouts</u>									
1998-99 rate	0.7%	0.5%	0.7%	0.7%	0.4%	0.5%	0.2%	0.3%	0.6%
1997-98 rate	0.4%	0.3%	0.7%	0.7%	0.9%	0.0%	0.6%	0.8%	0.5%
1996-97 rate	0.7%	0.6%	0.2%	0.6%	0.6%	3.3%	0.8%	0.2%	0.6%
1995-96 rate	0.3%	0.6%	0.8%	0.8%	0.1%	0.0%	0.8%	0.2%	0.5%
4-yr average rate	0.5%	0.5%	0.6%	0.7%	0.5%	0.9%	0.6%	0.4%	0.6%
<u>HS dropouts</u>									
1998-99 rate	5.0%	3.7%	3.5%	3.5%	4.0%	NA	3.5%	2.2%	4.2%
1997-98 rate	5.8%	4.8%	3.6%	4.0%	2.7%	NA	3.0%	1.6%	4.7%
1996-97 rate	6.9%	6.0%	3.5%	3.7%	1.8%	NA	3.8%	2.1%	5.5%
1995-96 rate	8.2%	4.5%	4.2%	2.9%	3.2%	NA	3.9%	1.2%	5.7%
4-yr average rate	6.5%	4.8%	3.7%	3.5%	2.9%	NA	3.6%	1.8%	5.0%

Another Type of Dropout Indicator—The Completion Rates

The dropout rates identified thus far in this report are annual snapshots of grade-by-grade dropouts. Those annual rates can be used to build a “synthetic” school completion rate for a specific class of students even though each student is not followed through high school. The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) developed a formula as a practical way to calculate a completion rate after studying of a variety of calculation methods.³ Using statewide data, the following completion rate has been calculated for the class of 1998-99.

Montana Public School Students—Grades 9-12

A.	Graduates 1998-99	10,925
	Dropouts Reported Grade 12—1998-99	511
	Dropouts Reported Grade 11—1997-98	613
	Dropouts Reported Grade 10—1996-97	700
	Dropouts Reported Grade 9—1995-96	732
B.	Total Graduates + 4 Years of Dropouts	13,551

Divide the Number of Graduates (A) by
Total Graduates + Dropouts (B) $10,925/13,551 = 81.0\%$

The synthetic completion rate for the Montana graduating class of 1998-99 is 81.0%. Applying that same formula to the class of 1997-98 provided a synthetic completion rate of 81.6%. Although this method is not precise, it does provide a good estimate of the portion of students who continue through the system to graduation.

School districts can apply this formula to their own dropout data for the past four years to obtain a local completion rate. However, it is important that the dropouts are determined using the instructions contained in the Dropout Collector’s Handbook.

What Helps Prevent Students from Dropping Out?

Several studies have identified effective strategies to prevent students from leaving high school before receiving a diploma.² Some of those strategies include:

- Providing intensive intervention through smaller alternative middle and high schools.
- Focusing on changing the classroom experience through professional development to improve curriculum and instruction rather than focusing on dropout prevention services.
- Mentoring and tutoring by supportive adults and peers.
- Evaluating the impact of policies, practices, and structures on all students.
- Providing collective support to school and student needs through community and family collaboration.

Final Note

Policy implications that were identified by research studies as critical to the effectiveness of dropout intervention strategies included:

- The choice of teachers is more important than the choice of curriculum.
- The high school level may be too late to begin implementing intervention strategies.
- Data is needed to design appropriate strategies to prevent students from dropping out.

The goal of gathering dropout information is to identify where and when students drop out of school and to use this knowledge to help keep students in school. Each community needs to learn the unique reasons why students drop out of their schools and, as a community, participate in supporting interventions to keep them in school and perhaps break the cycle of at-risk factors.

The Appendix, “Montana Dropout Rates 1998-99, By Category Size,” provides detailed information for each grade and size category.

—Prepared by Dori Burns Nielson

Data sources: ¹*Montana School District Dropout Reports 1998-99*
²*NEGP Monthly Report*, Vol. 2, NO 19, National Education Goals Panel (NEGP)
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³*Dropout Rates in the United States*, National Center for Education Statistics (NCES),
1999-082